



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
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IN REPLY REFER TO

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**Building Our Future Together
Occasional Thoughts: Spiritual Growth**

Dear Chaplain:

Earlier this year, I informed you that I would emphasize the importance of career development, emergent technologies, and spiritual growth. Respecting the rich diversity of faith traditions in our Corps, I interpret spiritual growth as a process where God mysteriously transforms our lives by reaffirming His love and our worth, refining our character, and sharpening our sense of purpose.

This letter contains three interconnected reasons why I believe spiritual growth is so important. First, spiritual growth ministries bring positive transformation in the lives of Sea Services men and women. A recent e-mail sent to me by a chaplain who referred a Sailor to a CREDO Personal Growth Retreat best illustrates this point. Listen to what the chaplain had to say:

"Last week, 17 of our Sailors went on a CREDO Retreat. It was my job to welcome them. I told them, 'If you were ordered to CREDO and do not really want to be here, let me know and I will see to it that you do not have to attend.' I was reluctant to make eye contact with one young man because he had the biggest frown I have ever seen on a person's face. I was afraid that he would take me up on my offer. I knew from his facial expression that he did not want to be here.

He went on the retreat and when the group returned, I asked the CREDO Director, how did the young man do. The Director said he saw some progress. I thought, 'yeah right!' Deep down inside, I was glad the young man did not run away. This past Thursday, a funny thing happened at our evening service. The young man came to the service, walked straight up to me, stuck out his hand and said, 'Thank you so much for encouraging me to attend CREDO. It was the best thing that has happened to me in my entire life.' He was smiling from ear to ear. He joined in the singing, shared in the study and had a grand time. We enjoyed his company and he enjoyed our fellowship."

What a great reminder of how important spiritual growth events are to young Sea Services people who are searching for healthy relationships, spiritual truths and ways to make their lives count for noble purposes.

Second, spiritual growth supports our institution's need to develop, retain and promote men and women of strong moral character. Our senior leadership has made a long-term commitment to creating an institutional climate where people can reach their full potential mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They are searching for ways to reinforce core values and ethical behaviors. Those values and behaviors promote mission accomplishment through teamwork, fair and equitable treatment, mutual respect, good order and discipline.

Because teachings on moral values and ethical behaviors are found in every faith tradition represented within our Corps, we have a tremendous opportunity to assist in the character development of those who will lead this Nation in the 21st Century. Admiral Leon A. Edney, U.S. Navy (Retired), addressing the United States House of Representatives Committee on Judiciary said, and I agree, "The character of a Nation and its leaders does matter and it matters most to those who are prepared to lay down their lives for that nation."

Whether imam, minister, priest or rabbi, it is imperative that we are men and women of exemplary character 24-hours a day. With godly influence, many of our people will not succumb to deceptive patterns and practices as their way to succeed in life. Some of the greatest spiritual growth occurring in Sea Services people come from their observing our walk with God.

Dr. John Hamre, Deputy Secretary of Defense, speaking at a National Character and Leadership Symposium, asserted,

"Character and integrity and the values that we cherish in our armed forces are learned attributes. They are things that we study. These are characteristics that we emulate by watching and learning from others."

Inspiring those within our sphere of influence to seek out God's favor is to open the way to ethical behavior and moral character. The most convincing argument for a loving and affirming God is loving and affirming followers. The result will be Sea Services people who are better military leaders, family members, colleagues, and friends.

Third, spiritual growth is important for us personally. It is difficult to point to a relationship that we know little about. God's love is for us too: His forgiveness, the answer to our own needs; and His promises, the source of hope for all of us. Hope within the reach of every Sailor, Marine, and Coast Guard person includes us. Quiet moments with God are great gifts. Just imagine, God has time just for us. To quote from The Sacred Romance, "Faith looks back and draws courage; hope looks ahead

and keeps desire alive ... and in between love reaches out to restore beauty in the hearts of others." God does not just wait for us at the end of the road, but is our companion all along the way.

So there you have it. A relationship with God gives meaning to the lives of our people, it enriches the climate of our Sea Services and promotes success, and it fills our own lives and ministry with the power of conviction. These are all important outcomes of spiritual growth, but of even greater significance is this truth; ultimately life is not about what we get, rather it is about what we give. We are told to give our lives away and discover life as it was always meant to be. Spiritual growth leads us ever deeper into this truth.

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